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WHAT HAPPENS TO CHILDREN IN THE TRANSITION FROM A PREDOMINANTLY RURAL ECONOMY TO MODERN INDUSTRIALIZATION.

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WESTERN COUNTRIES HAVE NEGLECTED THE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSITION FROM RURAL TO URBAN LIVING. IN CONTRAST TO THE RURAL CHILD, THE URBAN CHILD EXPERIENCES RESTRICTED MOVEMENT, REDUCED CONTACT WITH ADULTS, SEPARATION FROM ONE OR BOTH PARENTS DURING THE WORK DAY, CONSUMPTION OF GOODS WHILE SELDOM OBSERVING THEIR PRODUCTION, LESS EMPHASIS ON MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT, A MORE STRAINED EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH INDIVIDUAL EMOTIONS ARE CONCENTRATED ON FEWER PEOPLE, AND INCREASED EMPHASIS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MENTAL ABILITIES. SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING SOME OF THE DISADVANTAGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT IN RAPIDLY CHANGING URBAN SOCIETIES INCLUDE--(1) PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION OF AREAS FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF CHILDREN AT PLAY, (2) CONSTRUCTION OF HOUSES LARGE ENOUGH FOR FAMILY ACTIVITIES, (3) ARRANGING WORKING HOURS TO ALLOW FREE TIME FOR DAILY ACTIVITIES WITH THE CHILDREN, (4) ESTABLISHMENT OF NURSERY SCHOOLS AND KINDERGARTENS ALLOWING FREE PLAY, (5) PRODUCTION OF IMAGINATIVE, DURABLE TOYS, AND (6) VARIED CONTACTS WITH CHILDREN AND ADULTS OUTSIDE THE CHILD'S IMMEDIATE FAMILY. (DA)

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# WHAT HAPPENS TO CHILDREN IN THE TRANSITION FROM A PREDOMINANTLY RURAL ECONOMY TO MODERN INDUSTRIALIZATION? *

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## I

The greatest gain of modern civilization is the immense decrease in infant mortality. In Norway as of 1961 only 20 out of 1,000 children die during the first year of life, whereas around 1890 nearly 100 died before they reached the age of one year. Even the latter number is low when compared with, for instance, present-day Brazil or Egypt where the corresponding figures are 170 and 140 per thousand.

High infant mortality represents a terrifying loss of human life, in addition to the waste of maternal energy and the emotional strain on the parents. It is also apt to create deep anxiety in other children, whose fear of death will be increased by the all too frequent experience of seeing small brothers and sisters die.

Decrease in infant mortality involves a decrease in anxiety, sorrow and grief, and an increase in women's energy and happiness. It may also be a symptom of greater physical and mental security in society.

However, the road to such security and welfare is not devoid of dangers. Development in the western countries from 19th-century relative primitiveness to present-day civilization involves many factors, not all of them favorable to the attainment of present-day welfare. Other nations should be able to reach the same level of human welfare and security, including the low infant mortality, without the mistakes and negative aspects that have accompanied progress in the western world.

## II

Let us look at some of the changes that have taken place during the recent 100 years, e.g. in Norway, and concentrate on the losses incurred during the transition from a predominantly rural economy to modern industrialization.

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1. Under rural conditions people are surrounded by nature, and work out-of-doors, with animals, etc. If not expected to do the work of adults, children can play freely and safely with natural play material such as earth, flowers, pebbles, rocks, pieces of wood, branches of trees, berries and fruits, etc. They may run, jump, climb, swim without being constantly stopped by fences, traffic, walls, etc. City dwellers are surrounded by streets, houses and heavy, dangerous traffic --all obstacles made by men. Children are not themselves able to find constructive material for play. They are hampered in their movements by crowds of people, cars, signs of "entrance forbidden", "no trespassing", etc.

2. In rural societies and small towns outdoors-indoors has the character of a continuum. People are living near the ground level in one-or perhaps two-storey houses; doors are normally open or unlocked. Modern cities mainly consist of high houses, apartment houses, or skyscrapers, way above the surrounding ground, and with doors well locked. Whilst rural children can roam in and out of the house, and seek contact with the adults without difficulty, the world of urban children is divided by walls, doors, elevators, and vertical distances. Their call may not be heard by grown-ups in the house; their attempts to find shelter or contact with adults may be thwarted by closed doors, long staircases, elevators not workable by children, etc.

3. Work on farms, in old-fashioned craftshops, etc., is usually performed in or near the domicile. The members of the family participate in the productive work themselves or may watch it at close quarters. Contact between them is kept up even when they engaged in different activities. Industrialization means separation of domicile and place of work. It means earning money instead of producing things for consumption and use in the household. In the rural production unit children observe their parents, even their father, at their daily work. Early in life, they may be asked to participate in the work, perhaps even too early for their own good.

Urban children observe consumption more than production. They see things being bought, not produced. They see their father, maybe also their mother, leave home in the morning, compelled by some unknown and incomprehensible force called "work", abandoning the children for the day, and returning home tired at night. Playing together, making a noise, or just having contact, is often practically impossible. Except for occasional help around the house the children's own work begins when they enter school. There their occupation has no similarity to that of the adults, and they are supposed to learn from a not too well known teacher, not from the parents to whom they are tied emotionally from early life.

4. Most of rural activities are physical. Muscles are important both as regards strength and dexterity, whether the task be farming, taking care of animals, or further treatment of products. Manual and physical ability are estimated highly and lead up to concrete results in the form of definite products. Work in factories, offices, shops, etc., in towns implies less of physical strength and more of mental qualifications, ability to write and calculate, to handle machines,

to serve others and co-operate with them. Rural children early develop physical capacities sufficient for imitation of grown-up activities. Physical activity is a natural form of life for them, and rural conditions offer them much opportunity to use their muscles and to imitate behavior. Physical and manual skill will also be highly valued by them. Urban life is more likely to push children into passivity. They remain as onlookers outside shop windows and in the streets; they form part of an audience in movie theatres, circus and stadiums, in watching TV and reading comics. They may imitate father at his desk or behind the wheel of a car, mother vacuum-cleaning, shopping, or dressing for office. But activity is quite limited. They are expected to keep quiet at school, to sit at their desk, to learn a lesson--very much without evident, palpable, concrete results.

5. In a relatively primitive society the family consists not only of parents and their children, but usually of a larger group of people. Besides the parents there are also grandparents, married or unmarried uncles or aunts, cousins, helpers such as maids and servants, visiting bakers, cleaning women, seamstresses, etc. The home is frequently a community where many adults of varying ages and in different functions and roles exist together with a fairly large number of children (including siblings, cousins, etc.). In a group of this kind many activities are going on in which children may participate. There are also many objects of emotions and reactions. The members of the household may love, like, dislike, be irritated by, or show affection to one or to another, and perhaps change their objects time and again. Every member may be liked, loved, scolded, kicked, hugged, etc., by different persons, by other members of the group and in varying numbers. If involved in conflict with some one an individual may always find at least one other person who may agree with him and be on his side.

In a small group, as is often found in the cities, the emotional atmosphere is tighter. Each member of the family will concentrate her or his emotions on fewer persons. The mother's love is turned towards few children and is therefore more in demand, more in the focus of every child's attention, so that jealousy will be stronger and more frequent. A mother will be irritated by the same child more frequently and will not as easily find outlet towards other persons. Each of two children will be watched more continuously by the parents than a child among six or seven, and be the centre of more worry, more interest and more anxiety than a child surrounded by a crowd of siblings. Over-protection and over-attention are more likely to occur under the modern, restricted family system. Direct interpersonal conflicts will be more frequent in a small family. It will be more concentrated in the relationship of one special person to one other person, and less alleviated by the help and distraction of others than is the case in a large family.

## III

During the transition from family life in a rural setting to a different family structure in urban surroundings important values may be lost for the growing child even when strongly positive aspects are added to his life and situation. He may gain in such aspects as:

(a) Health, and chance to survive.
(b) Relief of a burden of chores, menial work and early responsibility.
(c) Enrichment of life by greater general variety, increased opportunities for social contact, added aesthetic values, more time for leisure.
(d) Increased opportunities for individual development of mental abilities.

But he may lose with respect to:

(a) Free bodily activity. Free access to constructive material.
(b) Participation in productive enterprises.
(c) Feeling for the importance of perseverance as leading to obvious results.
(d) Respect for all kinds of efforts, in mental as well as in physical work.
(e) Close observation of adult work as performed by beloved persons, and identification with such persons in their work.
(f) Immediate contact with adults for support, comfort, help and control.

In the Western countries little has been done to reduce such losses for the new generation, and attention has been directed too late to such problems so that much damage had already been done. Can the developing countries of our generation learn from our mistakes and manage their transition better?

## IV

What can be done in order to help the growing child in a rapidly changing society to make the best gains possible and to avoid dangers and losses?

If we regard in particular those areas where the child is likely to lose by the transition from rural to urban life, the following points present themselves:

1. Free areas must be reserved for children's activity. This is most easily done when town planning takes such demands into consideration before the pressure of population is felt and before communications are already under way. It is important to plan ahead, to reserve areas for playgrounds of various kinds before houses begin to spring up and streets to take their form.

Such playgrounds must be well protected against dangerous traffic. They must be varied and attractive, and made for children of different and ever changing ages. Small playgrounds for the youngest children must be arranged close to all houses, not more than 100-200 metres from the entrance door--and on the same side of the house as the entrance. Larger playgrounds for older pre-school children and for the youngest school children should be distributed with not too great intervals, and connected with the houses in such a way that children don't need to cross dangerous traffic in order to get to them. The playgrounds must be kept natural, not flat and monotonous, but with variation in terrain

and lay-out, in accordance with the demands of climate and play traditions in each country. School children need space for play, even for play of a free and imaginative character. More formal fields for games and sport will be necessary for older school children and teenagers.

2. The distribution of high and low houses must be considered from the viewpoint of children's need for easy contact with adults. Small children in play should be able to see and hear, be seen and be heard by, grown-ups for support, help and control. High houses might preferably be planned for offices and homes for families with no pre-school children. A sufficient number of low houses with apartments large enough for common family enterprises must be planned and constructed.

3. Children and their parents should be able to work and play together; both mother and father should have ample time for home life. Working hours should be arranged so as to give both parents free time daily for the children, and periodically free days and free weeks for family life. Opportunities should be provided and utilized for hobbies and productive activities in which parents and children may participate together.

4. In addition to the home special day institutions should be provided for the children. Pre-school children need nursery schools and kindergartens where they may play freely, join with children of their own age, and be supervised by well-trained grown-ups, with care and love but without too intensive emotional attachment to each child. For school children hobby centers should be available, where self-directed, productive activity can be encouraged by trained grown-ups, who may encourage initiative and individual efforts, and cooperation between equals.

5. To replace the missing natural constructive play material good toys activating imagination and invention must be produced and made available on loan or for sale at reasonable prices. Such toys should correspond to the traditions of each country, be solid, harmless, useful for varied purposes, suitable for each stage of the child's development, and prepared of material and in forms corresponding to the demands of general hygiene.

6. The shrinking size of the family points to the necessity for contacts with adults and children even outside the family, such as neighboring families around a playground, personnel and children in a day institution, in hobby centers and in vacation camps. Clubs and various organizations should be provided with suitable rooms, ample free areas, excursion grounds, etc. Training of personnel for such work should be started early enough to be ready for service when the transition from rural to urban community is beginning.

The Western countries have neglected the children in their cultural development. Many chances have been lost for the amelioration of children's conditions. It is to be hoped that such mistakes will serve as a warning to countries now going into the transitional stage from rural to urban life, from farming to industrial economy. It is to be hoped that not only the children's health will be improved, but also that their happiness and mental growth will be taken into account.